Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences

Volume 28 | Issue 3 Article 4

9-30-2025

Adultery and Infidelity: A Comparative Study of Kate Chopin’s The Awakening and Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil' s Aşk-ı Memnû (Forbidden Love)

Fikret Güven
Agri Ibrahim Cecen University, Agri, Türkiye, fikretguven@gmail.com

ORIGINAL STUDY

Adultery and Infidelity: A Comparative Study of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil' s *Aşk-ıMemnû* (Forbidden Love)

Fikret Güven

Agri Ibrahim Cecen University, Agri, Türkiye

ABSTRACT

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) and Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil's *Aşk-ıMemnû* (Forbidden Love, 1900) explore the oppressive gender expectations placed upon women in their societies of late 19th-century Louisiana Creole and Ottoman Istanbul. Despite their cultural and geographical differences, both novels depict heroines who are seeking personal autonomy and emotional fulfillment. However, they ultimately succumb to the rigid constraints of patriarchy. Edna Pontellier and Bihter Ziyagül embark on transformative journeys that challenge prescribed gender roles through extramarital relationships, yet their desires for independence are met with societal condemnation. Edna's rebellion stems from self-discovery and existential awakening, whereas a quest for passion and social validation shapes Bihter's actions. Both women's tragic suicides reveal the inescapable consequences of defying patriarchal norms, which underscore the systematic limitations placed on female agency. This comparative study situates *The Awakening* and *Aşk-ıMemnû* within feminist and psychoanalytic frameworks and it draws on theories by Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, Sigmund Freud, and other related theoreticians to analyze the intersection of gender, desire, and social order. By highlighting the structural barriers that deny women autonomy, the analysis shows how both works serve as criticism of gendered oppression and reflect the broader struggles of women who navigate patriarchal expectations across different cultural contexts.

Keywords: Gender roles, Patriarchy, Female autonomy, Feminism, Psychoanalysis

Introduction

Despite the modernist trends and feminist discourses, the institution of marriage continued to function as an effective medium to subjugate female subjectivity at the turn of the nineteenth century. This study tries to bring an approach to Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) and Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil's *Aşk-I Memnu* (1900) as critical texts that analyze the

Received 10 May 2024; revised 25 July 2024; accepted 15 October 2025.
Available online 30 September 2025

E-mail address: fikretguven@gmail.com (F. Güven).

https://doi.org/10.5782/2223-2621.1351

oppressive gender roles imposed upon women. Even though both texts are the products of different cultures of Creole Louisiana and late Ottoman İstanbul, both narratives focus on extramarital affairs that defy social orders which end up in self-destruction and fragmentation.

This comparative analysis has transnational feminist approaches to the selected texts. While *The Awakening* has long been canonized in Western literary criticism, *Aşk-ıMemnu* has rarely been juxtaposed alongside it in gender studies. This study positions both heroines in a critical dialogue to present how structurally and culturally distinct patriarchal orders subjugate female subjectivity in different sociopolitical terrains.

The study incorporates a multidisciplinary framework consisting of Beauvoir's concept of "the other", Butler's gender performative theory, Kristeva's "abjection" theory from Freud and Lacan. Those theoretical frameworks are systematically employed to show how both heroines defy the gender roles imposed upon them and how society retaliates against such defiance. Intersectional perspectives from theorists like Bell hooks and Nancy Fraser further establish the notions of class and economic dependency in shaping female subjectivity. In this light, the heroines' extramarital affairs are not only a personal rebellion, but also symptomatic of a deeper struggle for autonomy in systems that allow women little space for individual fulfillment.

Edna's rebellion stems from existential self-discovery while Bihter is completely driven by a pragmatic and romantic disenchantment. However, both protagonists are ultimately forced to confront the limits of female autonomy in a patriarchal context since their outbursts are delegitimized and their transgressions are marked by shame and guilt. Edna commits suicide which is an assertion of agency in the face of existential erasure. Bihter' s suicide shows the collapse of selfhood which is built on unstable performance of femininity and class aspirations. Ultimately, both narratives establish a cross-cultural feminist criticism of gender roles, which highlights how patriarchal ideologies oppress and punish female desires and ambitions. Both texts underscore the existential impasse women have to face and the transgressive female subjectivity that is rendered incompatible with societal expectations of virtue, motherhood, and heterosexual fidelity.

Methodology

This study adopts a comparative feminist literary methodology which is grounded in interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives from feminist philosophy, psychoanalysis, and cultural theory. The study follows a qualitative, interpretive approach based on close textual analysis to examine the intersections of gender, desire, and patriarchal control in *The Awakening* (1899) and *Aşk-ıMemnû* (1900). Both novels are interpreted as literary reflections of the late nineteenth-century sociocultural climates of Creole Louisiana and Ottoman Istanbul, which represents parallel patriarchal systems that constrain female subjectivity and autonomy.

The analysis employs a transnational and cross-cultural comparative framework that enables a dialogic reading between Western and Ottoman literary traditions. By juxtaposing Chopin's Edna and Uşaklıgil's Bihter, the study shows how both heroines articulate resistance to the domestic, moral, and ideological expectations imposed by patriarchal structures. The two narratives demonstrate shared patterns of repression, guilt, and self-destruction that expose the structural universality of women's subjugation. This comparative orientation challenges the limits of Western feminist criticism by integrating Ottoman literary modernity into a broader feminist dialogue that encompasses diverse forms of gendered experience.

The theoretical foundation relies upon Simone de Beauvoir's concept of woman as "the Other," which provides an existential framework for understanding the social construction of female identity within patriarchal hierarchies (de Beauvoir, 1953). Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity is applied to show how both protagonists resist and ultimately succumb to the performative expectations of femininity, motherhood, and heterosexuality (Butler, 1990, 2004). Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection offers a lens through which to interpret the social and psychological marginalization of women who transgress moral and sexual boundaries (Kristeva & Roudiez, 1982). Psychoanalytic insights from Freud and Lacan illuminate the unconscious drives, desires, and anxieties that shape both heroines' crises of identity and selfhood (Freud, 1924; Lacan, 1956). Complementary theoretical contributions from bell hooks and Nancy Fraser add an intersectional dimension by emphasizing how class, race, and economic dependency intensify the mechanisms of female oppression (hooks, 1984, 1990; Fraser, 1997).

The methodology draws on close reading and interpretive synthesis rather than quantitative analysis. Both novels are examined through their central symbols, narrative structures, and thematic patterns to uncover how representations of female rebellion are constructed within patriarchal discourse. Symbolic elements such as the sea in *The Awakening* and the mirror in *Aşk-ıMemnû* are analyzed as metaphors for self-recognition, transgression, and the impossibility of a complete emancipation. Each text is read in conjunction with theoretical frameworks to sustain conceptual coherence and interpretive rigor. This approach provides a layered understanding of how Chopin and Uşaklıgil expose the contradictions between women's desires for autonomy and the societal systems that deny them legitimacy.

The scope of the study is limited to the exploration of female subjectivity and rebellion in the selected novels. It does not seek to provide a comprehensive historical or sociological account of either culture, but rather interprets the novels as ideological and aesthetic articulations of gendered experience. Male perspectives are acknowledged only insofar as they reinforce patriarchal authority. This selective emphasis aligns with the study's primary objective: to reveal the psychological, moral, and existential mechanisms through which both Chopin and Uşaklıgil dramatize the confinement of female agency. This methodological approach underscores the significance of comparative feminist analysis in revealing the transnational dimensions of patriarchal modernity. By merging feminist literary theory, psychoanalysis, and cultural contextualization, the analysis situates both narratives within a global discourse on female autonomy. It highlights literature's enduring capacity to challenge gendered hierarchies and illuminate the historical conditions that continue to constrain women's pursuit of freedom and self-definition.

To ensure theoretical coherence, this study consciously reorients its interdisciplinary framework toward a more integrative and dialogic approach. Rather than employing Beauvoir, Butler, Kristeva, and other theorists as separate analytical lenses, the revised reading synthesizes their insights under a unified conceptual concern: the construction, performance, and transgression of female subjectivity within patriarchal modernity. Each theoretical perspective thus contributes to a shared interpretive structure that examines how gender identity is formed and destabilized through social regulation and individual resistance. By situating both Chopin's and Uşaklıgil's heroines within this cohesive framework, the analysis underscores that the theoretical multiplicity enriches, rather than fragments, the interpretive scope, which allows for a more nuanced understanding of how different ideological systems produce similar mechanisms of female containment. While Chopin's narrative dramatizes the existential limits of selfhood in a bourgeois Western context, Uşaklıgil's novel exposes the sociopolitical and material dimensions of women's subjugation in a rapidly modernizing empire. This recalibrated focus ensures that both texts are treated as complementary case studies in the global discourse on gender and

modernity, demonstrating that their distinct cultural specificities converge in illuminating the universal contradictions of female autonomy and patriarchal discipline.

Edna Pontellier's Awakening

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) investigates the psychological and societal struggles of the main character. Edna Pontellier rejects the prescribed duties of femininity and motherhood which are dictated by the patriarchal structure of late 19th century. As Edna asserts her independence, she resists the Victorian ideal of the "angel in the house" notion which is Adèle Ratignolle embodies as she represents the self-sacrificing mother-woman. Instead, Edna identifies with Mademoiselle Reisz who subverts traditional gender roles and serves as an ideal of female autonomy. Chopin reinforces this contrast through Edna's reflections: "She was fond of her children in an uneven, impulsive way. She would sometimes gather them passionately to her heart; she would sometimes forget them" (Chopin & Stone, 1899, p. 19). This inconsistent maternal instinct directly contradicts the era's expectations of unwavering devotion. Mademoiselle Reisz warns Edna that an artist must have "a courageous soul that dares and defies" (p. 78), reflecting Edna's struggle to forge a path of self-expression and independence.

Edna Pontellier's awakening can be examined through Freudian, Lacanian, and Butlerian lenses, each revealing her struggle against patriarchal constraints. Her dissatisfaction with domestic life signals repressed longing, aligning with Freud's theory of the unconscious, as Gilbert and Gubar argue, female protagonists in 19th-century literature often "struggle against a culture that restricts them to prescribed roles" (1979, p. 77). Edna's realization that she cannot conform is evident when she weeps without understanding why: "She could not have told why she was crying" (p. 8).

Friedan's (1963) concept of the "problem that has no name" resonates with Edna's dissatisfaction with domestic life and her yearning for a deeper sense of self. Friedan argues that women's identities have been subsumed by their roles as wives and mothers which mirrors Edna's realization that societal expectations have shaped her individuality. Edna acknowledges this conflict when she says: "I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself" (p. 80). This declaration shows her internal division between duty and selfhood. Ahmed (2004a) expands on the idea that women's discontent is deeply embedded in structural oppression, which parallels Edna's sense of entrapment. Ahmed's argument that resistance itself is an act of feminist survival is consistent with Edna's pursuit of self-sovereignty despite societal constraints. Similarly, Manne (2018) is critical of how patriarchal structures enforce expectations of female sacrifice that reinforce why Edna's nonconformity is perceived as disruptive and unnatural. Jones (2020) also emphasizes that her yearning for independence reflects a desire for a state of unmediated selfhood free from societal symbols and expectations. Thus, Edna's final act is not merely a tragic surrender but an assertion of agency against a world that denies her existence outside prescribed roles.

hooks (1984) highlights the racial and class dimensions of women's oppression. While Edna faces gendered constraints, she still occupies a position of relative privilege compared to women of colour, particularly the quadroon nurse who cares for her children. hooks criticizes white feminism as historically exclusionary by arguing that "white women, as a group, have never shared a common oppression with black women" (1984, p. 16). This prompts a re-examination of Edna's awakening in relation to race and class. Though the novel does not fully engage with the experiences of women of colour, their presence in the narrative underscores the racialised hierarchies that shape gender roles. The quadroon nurse remains largely silent which emphasizes her marginalisation within both the novel

and society. Likewise, Gilbert and Gubar argue that literature has long constructed women within the binary of either the passive angel in the house or the rebellious madwoman: "women have been imprisoned in male texts, confined in images of inferiority, trapped within male houses" (1979, p. 13). Edna's fate reflects this dichotomy as her refusal to conform renders her an outcast, which positions her closer to the "madwoman" archetype. Unlike the obedient wife, Edna challenges patriarchal order. Yet, her inability to find a viable alternative within society leads to her demise which reinforces the oppressive structures that limit female autonomy.

Edna's final swim can be read through Kristeva's theory of abjection, which suggests that women who reject traditional roles become abject figures: socially cast out because they disrupt the symbolic order. Kristeva describes abjection as "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (1982, p. 4). As Edna walks into the sea, she experiences a sense of freedom: "A feeling of exultation overtook her, as if some power of significant import had been given her soul" (Chopin & Stone, 1899, p. 120). This moment of transcendence is consistent with Kristeva's assertion that those who embrace the abject exist beyond societal structures, yet at the cost of exclusion and destruction.

Butler argues that gender is a social construct reinforced through repeated actions, stating that "gender is not something one is, it is something one does, an act a 'doing' rather than a 'being'" (1990, p. 25). Edna's transformation shows a disruption of the performative nature of femininity. By refusing to conform to expected behaviours, she challenges the stability of gender norms and exposes their constructed nature. However, society's refusal to accommodate her self-redefinition leaves her with no viable space for existence outside of prescribed femininity. Edna's transformation throughout the novel can be interpreted as an unraveling of this performative aspect of femininity. In the beginning, she lives up to the expectations of a devoted wife and dutiful mother, but as she gains self-awareness, she rejects these performances. Her acts of defiance represent an attempt to deconstruct and redefine her gender identity on her own terms. Butler argues "the effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body" (1990, p. 33).

Butler (1990) argues that gender identity is not an intrinsic essence but an effect produced by repeated social performances that sustain cultural norms. Edna's progressive refusal to enact the "mother-woman" ideal represents not merely personal rebellion but a disruption of this performative cycle. Her movement between domestic and artistic spaces reflects what Butler terms the "failure of iteration," moments in which the repetition of gender norms falters and reveals their artificiality. When Edna relocates to the "pigeon house" and begins to paint, her actions dramatize the instability of gender as a coherent identity: a process through which she reclaims the body and self from socially imposed scripts. This sustained application of Butler's framework illuminates how Chopin transforms Edna's individual gestures into political acts of undoing the patriarchal performance of femininity, making her awakening an existential and linguistic redefinition of womanhood itself.

Edna's physical liberation symbolizes her rejection of the rigidly defined feminine performance. Instead of embracing a fluid, self-determined existence, by stepping outside these constraints, she challenges the notion that womanhood is inherently tied to subservience. Expanding on Butler's theory of gender performativity, hooks criticizes how feminist movements have historically centred white, middle-class women's experiences while marginalising the unique struggles of women of colour. hooks asserts that "feminism in the United States has never emerged from the women who are most victimised by sexist oppression, women who are daily beaten down, mentally, physically, and spiritually" (1984, p. 1). Applying hooks' intersectional approach to *The Awakening*, one might consider how Edna's privilege as a white, upper-class woman will allow her to pursue self-liberation in ways that were unavailable to marginalised women. While Edna experiences societal

restrictions, she does not face the compounded barriers of race and economic disadvantage, which means her rebellion is both personal and limited in scope. This perspective complicates readings of Edna's agency which highlights how feminist liberation is not a monolithic experience.

Rich (1980) argues that heterosexuality is not just a sexual orientation, but an institution imposed upon women to ensure their dependency on men. She writes, "heterosexuality, like mothering, needs to be recognized and studied as a political institution" (p. 657). Edna's rejection of her prescribed marital role and her pursuit of passion outside of her marriage can be interpreted as acts of resistance against this compulsory heterosexuality. While her romantic interests remain within heterosexual relationships, her deep emotional connections with women, such as Mademoiselle Reisz, suggests an alternative form of intimacy that exists beyond patriarchal structures. Music, in this sense, becomes more than a mere art form: it is a medium through which Edna experiences a non-normative emotional fulfillment that defies societal expectations. Chopin describes that Mademoiselle Reisz's music makes Edna feel "intoxicated" and "some very passionate longing" (p. 41) which highlights how this relationship provides her with a medium for self-expression beyond traditional romantic entanglements.

Luce Irigaray argues that "female identity has been defined in terms of the masculine, as a lack, an absence, or a negativity" (1985, p. 76). Edna's journey can thus be seen as an attempt to carve out a space for female self-expression outside the dominant patriarchal language. Her resistance is not only enacted through physical actions such as swimming, moving out of her husband's home, and engaging in extramarital relationships, but also through her growing detachment from the restrictive language of wifehood and motherhood. Irigaray's notion that true female subjectivity requires a new, self-defined linguistic framework is consistent with Edna's struggle to articulate her desires in a world that lacks the vocabulary for female autonomy. This struggle is evident when she confesses to Robert, "I give myself where I choose" (Chopin & Stone, 1899, p. 108). This underscores her attempt to assert control over her identity and agency despite the limitations of available discourse.

Upon arriving at Grand Isle for a summer retreat, Edna Pontellier begins to experience an internal transformation, catalyzed by her encounter with Robert Lebrun. Overwhelmed by an unidentifiable sense of confinement, she describes feeling an "indescribable oppression, which seemed to generate in some unfamiliar part of her consciousness" (Chopin & Stone, 1899, p. 9). This is consistent with de Beauvoir (1953) argument where she claims that women are defined and differentiated by their proximity to a man. Her identity is solely determined by her proximity and relations with other men around her. Edna realizes that she is fully aware of her socially imposed role as a wife and mother and this dissatisfaction suggests roles that do not define her true self but serve as a confinement. This is further reinforced by her husband, who says she neglects their children. She responds to this accusation with detachment and indifference. According to Taylor (2021) her awakening is a deep political mutiny against the institutional structures that have restricted female agency. Likewise, Roberts (2023) claims that Edna's transformation shows the limits of personal autonomy in the rigid societal constraints that have come to define her.

Later Edna is invited for a late-night swim by Roberts. This is an experience that serves as a pivotal moment in her journey toward self-awareness. Emerging from the water, she feels invigorated and begins to question her existence and place within the social order. Her swim symbolizes her initial rejection of the gender performance she has been enacting for most of her life. This awakening is further intensified when she listens to Mademoiselle Reisz performance on the piano. The music elicits a visceral response, sending tremors through her body and compelling her to tears. As Chopin describes, "the very first chords

which Mademoiselle Reisz struck upon the piano sent a keen tremor down Mrs. Pontellier's spinal column" (p. 40). Edna's transformation reaches a critical juncture during the group night swim at Grand Isle. Characterized by solitude and self-discovery, this moment is depicted as a metaphorical rebirth: "She resembled a child who of a sudden realizes its powers, and walks for the first time alone, boldly and with over-confidence" (p. 43).

Water serves as a powerful motif representing Edna Pontellier's journey toward independence and self-realization. Throughout the novel, the sea symbolizes escape from societal constraints and a medium for personal discovery. Jarrell (2022) argues that each of Edna's interactions with water marks a critical stage in her rebellion against the restrictive roles assigned to her as a wife and mother. Her first successful swim becomes a pivotal moment that signifies her growing awareness of her own desires and strength. However, her ultimate decision to surrender to the sea is a suggestion of the tragic consequences of a woman's quest for autonomy in a society that refuses to accommodate it. Chopin captures this final moment with a haunting clarity: "She looked into the distance, and the old terror flamed up for an instant, then sank again" (p. 122). Carter & Ellison (2023) argue that her final swim is a representation of both an assertion of agency and a criticism of the impossibility of true female liberation within the patriarchal system. Additionally, suggests that her emotions serve as a testament to the novel's radical challenge to gendered expectations of emotional containment.

Her growing disillusionment with societal norms is further demonstrated when she attends mass but becomes physically and emotionally overwhelmed by the oppressive atmosphere of the church. Seeking respite, Robert takes her to Madame Antoine's home. In solitude, she observes her own body with newfound appreciation: "the fine, firm quality and texture of her flesh" (2011, p. 58). Edna's realization signifies her rejection of the imposed identity that society has constructed for her. Falling into a deep sleep, she later wakes up to an internal realization, asking herself, "How many years have I slept?" (p. 59). This rhetorical question signifies her newfound awareness and an implicit rejection of the life she has previously accepted. She defies the Other status constantly imposed on her by patriarchal society which refuses to be defined solely in relation to men. This struggle agrees with Irigaray's critique of the symbolic order that defines femininity as a passive, secondary position. Irigaray & Porter (1985) argues that women's economic and emotional dependence on men perpetuates their status as "the Other," which renders female subjectivity nearly impossible within patriarchal structures. However, Edna's pursuit of self-definition represents a refusal to be confined within this framework. It seeks to exist not as a reflection of male desire but as a subject in her own right.

Before departing for her new home, Edna hosts a grand dinner for a group of guests. This event serves as a pivotal moment which symbolizes her official declaration of independence from the constraints of patriarchy: "She felt like some newborn creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known" (Chopin & Stone, 1899 p. 139). The exclusivity of the gathering of select guests underscores her newfound determination and autonomy. Adorned in elaborate jewelry and radiant attire, she embodies a goddess-like presence that exudes confidence and self-possession. De Beauvoir argues that "to be feminine is to be destined for the repetition of life" (1953, p. 456), a fate Edna sought to escape. Unlike other women of her time, who accept their prescribed roles, Edna asserts herself as an individual rather than the Other, existing solely in relation to men. Harrington (2022) suggests that the dinner scene operates as a symbolic rite of passage, with Edna staging her transition from domesticity to self-sovereignty. Similarly, Lin (2023) argues that Edna's careful curation of the guest list represents her conscious rejection of the restrictive social order and favoring those who reflect her evolving identity. Butler asserts that "gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space

through a stylized repetition of acts" (1990, p. 140). Edna's rejection of these repetitive performances is a decisive break from traditional femininity which illustrates that gender roles are not innate but socially constructed and enforced.

During the dinner, an accidental moment foreshadows the challenges that lie ahead: she shatters her glass against a carafe, spilling wine onto her lover's legs and staining Mrs. Highcamp's dress. This incident carries symbolic weight, as Mrs. Highcamp was the first to witness Edna's affair with Alcée Arobin. The stain thus serves as a metaphor for the irreversible choices she is about to make which emphasizes that her rejection of societal expectations comes with permanent consequences. Mitchell (2024) interprets this moment as an embodiment of what Ahmed (2004a) calls the "feminist killjoy" figure: someone whose defiance of social norms is a disruption of the harmonious function of patriarchy. While accidental, Edna's act mirrors the broader discomfort that her awakening generates in those around her.

As a final assertion of her independence, Edna moves into what she calls the "pigeon-house," a modest residence where she is freed from the obligations of wifehood and motherhood. This transition marks a significant step in her self-liberation which reinforces Chopin's depiction of female autonomy: "Every step which she took toward relieving herself from obligations added to her strength and expansion as an individual" (p. 149). However, Léonce perceives her departure not as an assertion of selfhood but as a threat to his reputation. Concerned about public perception, he issues a notice to the newspaper and attributes the move to a temporary home renovation rather than marital discord. His reaction reinforces de Beauvoir's argument that men define women through the roles they assign them: "She is nothing other than what man decides; she is thus called 'the sex,' meaning that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being" (1953, p. xxii). Patel (2023) examines Edna's move into the pigeon-house and argues that while her decision shows a radical departure from societal expectations, her financial security enables her escape in ways unavailable to women of lower economic status.

Edna's move aligns with hooks' concept of "homeplace," which argues that women, particularly those in patriarchal societies, must create spaces for themselves outside of traditional domestic settings to develop their own identities. hooks states that "homeplace was the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist" (1990, p. 42). However, Edna's pigeon-house remains tied to societal constraints, since it does not fully liberate her from gendered expectations, particularly regarding motherhood. Despite her newfound independence, Edna remains tethered to her maternal instincts. She returns to her former home to visit her children, showering them with affection and attentively listening to their stories. Her visit serves as a moment of reconciliation, as she seeks to ease her conscience for her emotional detachment. However, the fundamental conflict between her identity as an individual and her role as a mother remains unresolved. De Beauvoir asserts that "maternity is the strange compromise of narcissism, altruism, dream, sincerity, bad faith, devotion, and cynicism" (1953, p. 514). Edna embodies this paradox, as she deeply loves her children yet is unable to surrender her own selfhood entirely to them.

Upon returning home, Edna discovers a farewell note from Robert: "I love you. Goodbye because I love you" (p. 178). His departure devastates her which reaffirms her belief that personal fulfillment within the rigid structures of her world is unattainable. Edna's love for Robert echoes Lacan's idea that unattainable ideals shape desires. His parting words affirm that societal constraints make fulfillment impossible. As Bronfen argues, female desire in literature is often "conditioned by loss, structured by absence" (1992, p. 178).

In response, she resolves to return to the sea. As she swims, fully nude, Chopin likens her to "some newborn creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never

known" (p. 182). Her nakedness represents not only vulnerability but also an ultimate rejection of societal constraints, as she embraces her final act of liberation. By shedding her clothes, Edna symbolically rejects the restrictive "situation" imposed upon her as a woman, embracing a raw, unmediated existence free from patriarchal expectations. However, her fate also reinforces Butler's argument that those who deviate from gender norms face severe consequences: "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (1990, p. 25).

The sea represents both the Freudian death drive (Thanatos) and Lacanian *jouissance*, the excessive pursuit of pleasure beyond social limits. Edna's first independent swimming signals newfound freedom: "She was like the little tottering, stumbling, clutching child, who of a sudden realizes its powers" (p. 27). Yet, as Modleski notes, "women's pursuit of pleasure is invariably cast as self-annihilation" (1991, p. 25), which foreshadows Edna's fate. Her final return to the sea, described as a "soft, close embrace" (p. 109), displays her confrontation with both *Thanatos* and *jouissance*, where desire and destruction merge.

A deeper psychoanalytic reading reveals how Edna's awakening functions as both liberation and regression within Freudian and Kristevan paradigms. Freud's concept of the death drive (Thanatos) and Kristeva & Roudiez (1982) notion of abjection converge in Edna's final return to the sea, which embodies the tension between self-creation and self-dissolution. Often interpreted as a symbol of freedom, the sea can also be read as the maternal abyss. It is a site of pre-linguistic unity that precedes the constraints of the symbolic order. Edna's immersion into the water thus represents an unconscious desire to return to a state beyond social definition, echoing Kristeva's claim that the abject simultaneously attracts and annihilates the subject. This interpretation deepens the psychoanalytic dimension by suggesting that Edna's death is not merely an act of despair but a radical psychic re-entry into the unbounded, maternal realm that patriarchal culture represses. Through this lens, Chopin's closing image transcends tragic fatalism and becomes a profound meditation on the costs of female subjectivity within the symbolic order of nineteenth-century modernity.

Her liberation is transient and reveals the structural impossibility of true independence within a world that refuses to accommodate female subjectivity. Heilman (2008) observes that when women seek to follow their passions and defy prescribed gender roles, they inevitably face formidable challenges. Though revolutionary in its defiance, Edna's journey ultimately reveals the harsh reality that complete liberation from patriarchal constraints remains elusive. She defies the Other status imposed upon her and deconstructs gender performances; however, her story ends in solitude, which reinforces the barriers that prevent women from achieving true independence. Her final swimming is both an act of resistance and a surrender, which encapsulates the tension between self-discovery and the rigid structures that governs women's lives.

Upon her return, Léonce refers to her as "my precious" (p. 3), underscoring his possessive attitudes toward her. This insinuates that she is treating her more as an object of value than as an autonomous individual. His concern over her sunburn is similarly an indicative sign of this objectification, as he remarks, "It is folly to bathe at such an hour in such heat" (p. 3), as if lamenting the damage done to an inanimate possession. Like many other women living under patriarchy, Edna is treated like the Other: she is solely defined by her relation to other men rather than her own self. Irigaray & Porter (1985) states that women are exchanged as commodities between men. This is very consistent with Edna's situation who her husband treats as a commodity. Women's economic and social dependence on men perpetuates their subjugation further. As Edna tries to defy this structure, her ultimate demise shows that dismantling a society that refuses to acknowledge

female agency is nearly impossible. Gilbert & Gubar (1979) argue that women are forced into two binary roles of "the angel or the monster". The angel is obedient in fulfilling patriarchal expectations, and they embrace domesticity, while the monster is a cautionary figure who refuses self-sacrifice. The monster's fate is often tragic. Edna refuses to be the angel who refuses to be a self-effacing mother. This ultimately alienates Edna from the societal structures that have defined womanhood. Thus, Edna's ultimate demise reveals existential limitations imposed on women who are seeking autonomy and agency. As she disrupts the roles assigned to her and her further alienation shows the impossibility of true female liberation. In a world which demands full obedience and sacrifice, her bold act of suicide is a moment of triumph and recognition of the insurmountable barriers that surround her.

Bihter Ziyagül' s Awakening in Aşk-ıMemnu

Bihter's awakening differs significantly from that of Edna's, as her motivations are rooted not in a pursuit of personal autonomy but in a calculated decision to prioritize financial security over love. This is consistent with Parla (2011, p. 203) argument that "Bihter's rebellion is not only moral but epistemological; she exposes the limits of a bourgeois rationality that defines virtue through control, not through freedom." Uşaklıgil thereby uses Bihter's emotional disillusionment to critique the moral hypocrisy of Ottoman modernity, where the discourse of refinement conceals a deeply gendered repression. Unlike Edna, whose transformation is driven by a rejection of the roles imposed upon her, Bihter's agency is constrained by a society that dictates marriage as the primary means of securing a woman's future. Akyüz states, "Women's futures were predominantly determined by the success of their marriages, leaving little room for individual ambition or romantic choice" (2023, p. 134). Marriage functions not as an act of personal fulfillment but as a necessity for maintaining social status.

The novel begins with a boat trip featuring Firdevs Hanım and her daughters, Bihter and Peyker, setting the stage for a family dynamic that is characterized by indulgence, extravagance, and moral ambiguity. Uşaklıgil's critique of patriarchy operates through a distinctly Ottoman lens, where modernization, Westernization, and class anxiety intersect with gender. The novel's male characters (particularly Adnan Bey and Behlül) embody the contradictions of a patriarchal order caught between traditional morality and imported European modernity. Adnan Bey's paternal authority, presented as benevolent yet controlling, reflects the late Ottoman ideal of patriarchal rationality that equates social order with male guardianship. Tekeli (1986, p. 47) aptly notes that "Ottoman patriarchy survived modernization by redefining itself as protection; male dominance did not disappear—it became paternal benevolence." This observation contextualizes Adnan Bey's character as a localized expression of patriarchal continuity under the guise of moral progress. In contrast, Behlül's hedonism and emotional detachment exemplify the moral decay that modernization introduces into Istanbul's elite households. By examining these male figures alongside Bihter's constrained agency, her rebellion within a cultural matrix where male subjectivity both enforces and fractures patriarchal norms. This perspective emphasizes that Bihter's tragedy arises not merely from personal desire but from her entrapment within a transitional Ottoman society negotiating between feudal patriarchy and bourgeois modernity.

However, the death of Melih Bey has left the family in financial distress which exacerbates their precarious social standing. As Moran (1990, p. 142) observes, *Aşk-ıMemnû* dramatizes "the tragedy of a society attempting to modernize its surface without transforming its moral foundations; thus, Westernization becomes an imitation rather than an

internal renewal." This insight clarifies how Bihter's personal rebellion mirrors the broader cultural anxiety of a class performing modernity while remaining bound by traditional codes of honor and gender. Furthermore, Firdevs' history of infidelity has long tarnished their reputation, which reinforces the novel's exploration of moral decay, corruption, and societal judgment. In this rigidly charged patriarchal atmosphere, Bihter understands that her only path to stability lies in securing a financially advantageous marriage. She says, "For us women, love is merely an amusement; what truly matters is life itself" (p. 87), which acknowledges the pragmatic approach she takes toward relationships. Göknar (2022) argues that women's constrained autonomy in historical narratives like *Aşk-ıMemnu* is a reflection of ongoing global issues in terms of gendered economic dependence and societal pressures on marriages: "The financial limitations imposed on women in historical narratives often mirror contemporary struggles, which emphasizes the persistent nature of economic oppression" (2022, p. 211).

Driven by vanity, materialism, and insatiable desires for admiration, Firdevs Hanım strongly harbors feelings of rivalry instead of maternal affection towards Bihter. This antagonism is particularly evident in her reaction to Adnan Bey's marriage proposal, as she perceives herself to be a more appropriate match. Yıldıran notes that Firdevs sees Bihter "as a competitor who has taken Adnan Bey away from her" (2017, p. 224). Arslan (2023) further argues that the generational conflict between Firdevs and Bihter illustrates broader patterns of maternal competition in patriarchal societies where women are conditioned to view each other as threats rather than allies: "Firdevs' hostility toward Bihter underscores the societal expectation that women must fight for male validation, rather than find solidarity with one another" (Yıldıran, 2017, p. 187). Their toxic dynamic is further illustrated by de Beauvoir (1953) theory that women, deprived of true autonomy, are often forced into competition for male validation rather than solidarity. Bihter's disdain is palpable in her accusation: "You are not my mother; you are my rival!" (p. 156), showing a confrontation of the power struggle between them.

Bihter's careful performance of bourgeois virtues of her refined language, controlled gestures, and adherence to domestic decorum, reveals the constructed and fragile nature of femininity in Ottoman high society. Yet this repetition collapses when she begins her affair with Behlül, exposing the artificiality of the very norms she has performed. Her moral disintegration is not simply a failure of character but, as Butler would argue, a moment when the performative cycle breaks down and the illusion of a coherent feminine identity is shattered. Thus, Uşaklıgil demonstrates how patriarchal morality depends upon women's disciplined repetition of socially approved gestures, and how deviation from these gestures transforms the woman from an object of admiration into an object of shame.

hooks (1984) critiques the reduction of feminism to a singular struggle against patriarchy, emphasizing the intersectionality of race, class, and gender in shaping women's oppression. Bihter's experience aligns with hooks' assertion that economic insecurity profoundly impacts women's agency. Unlike Edna, whose privileged position allows her to explore individual freedom, Bihter's choices are dictated by material necessity, reflecting hooks' argument that feminism must acknowledge economic disparities in female autonomy. A study by Kaya & Demir (2022) exemplifies how economic constraints continue to shape women's agency in contemporary Turkish society, mirroring Bihter's struggle in historical fiction. Kaya and Demir argue, "the economic dependency of women in modern Turkey is deeply rooted in historical patterns of financial subordination that make narratives like *Aşk-ıMemnu* particularly relevant today" (p. 303). Similarly, Smith (1987) highlights how social institutions, particularly marriage and family, function as sites of power that regulate women's roles. Bihter's marriage is not an act of love but an institutionalized performance of femininity that ensures her survival in a society that

values women primarily as wives and daughters. She reflects: “I have set love aside; I am focused on building my life” (p. 98) which reinforces her pragmatic decision-making.

The conflict between mother and daughter reaches its peak when Adnan Bey expresses his intention to marry Bihter. Firdevs strongly opposes the union by citing the significant age difference as a concern. However, her resistance is not born out of maternal concern but rather out of envy. Behlül’s observations further illuminate this underlying tension: “This is not a mother, but a woman hostile to her daughter’s happiness” (p. 399). Despite her mother’s disapproval, Bihter remains resolute in her decision to marry Adnan Bey, recognizing that the marriage will restore her family’s reputation and provide her with a life of wealth and opulence. As Uşaklıgil states, “She would be the sole owner of a magnificent mansion” (p. 42), emphasizing the transactional nature of her choice.

Erdem (2023) suggests that Bihter’s ultimate demise is emblematic of the patriarchal punishment imposed on women who attempt to navigate societal constraints through calculated self-interest. Erdem writes, “Bihter’s tragic fate serves as a harsh warning for women who challenge societal norms while striving for financial stability” (2023, p. 245). Unlike Edna, who pursues personal and sexual liberation, Bihter’s awakening is shaped by pragmatism and a desire for upward social mobility. In her pursuit of financial security, Bihter adheres to the performative expectations of femininity by playing the role of the obedient wife. Consistent with Butler’s argument that womanhood is an act a ‘doing’ rather than a ‘being’” (1990, p. 25), Bihter’s performance of femininity is inherently unstable and susceptible to disruption. Building on this idea, Fraser argues that “the problem with this approach is that it often neglects issues of economic injustice” (1997, p. 12). Fraser’s criticism is particularly relevant in analyzing Bihter’s predicament, as it emphasizes the material conditions that shape women’s lives.

Scholars such as Berna Moran (1990), Jale Parla (2011), and Nurdan Gürbilek (2001) have examined how late Ottoman fiction negotiates modernization through domestic and moral narratives, positioning the female body as a symbolic terrain upon which the anxieties of cultural transformation are inscribed. Moran highlights *Aşk-ıMemnû* as a foundational text in Turkish realism, where Westernization manifests as both liberation and corruption, while Parla interprets Bihter as a “modern tragic heroine” whose desires are constrained by the moral economy of Tanzimat modernity. Gürbilek’s analysis of “feminine melancholy” in Ottoman-Turkish prose further contextualizes Bihter’s disillusionment as a symptom of the bourgeois family’s failure to reconcile imported modern ideals with indigenous moral values. Integrating these perspectives enriches the analysis by grounding Bihter’s rebellion in the historical texture of Ottoman modernization rather than solely within universalized feminist paradigms.

Incorporating Turkish feminist and cultural criticism also reveals that Uşaklıgil’s text articulates a uniquely Ottoman model of patriarchy that differs from the Western bourgeois domestic ideal often analyzed through Anglophone theory. As critics such as Fatma Aliye Topuz and Şirin Tekeli have observed, late Ottoman discourse on women’s emancipation emerged not through radical rupture but through negotiation with Islamic moral codes and social hierarchy. Within this framework, *Aşk-ıMemnû* exposes the paradoxes of this transitional morality: Bihter’s pursuit of love and self-determination challenges the patriarchal authority embodied by Adnan Bey but simultaneously reaffirms the social necessity of male guardianship. Engaging with this indigenous intellectual tradition demonstrates that Uşaklıgil’s critique of gender cannot be divorced from the broader Ottoman debates on modernity, virtue, and family. Thus, the inclusion of Turkish literary scholarship situates the novel more authentically within its national intellectual milieu, achieving the cultural balance necessary for a genuinely comparative feminist reading.

Bihter's eventual disillusionment reveals the limits of this performance which exposes the gap between the socially constructed ideal of marriage and her internal reality. She harbors a deeply suppressed energy and yearns to break free from the monotonous existence she shares with her mother and sister. Initially an act of defiance against her family, her marriage to Adnan Bey soon proves unfulfilling and leaves her with a profound sense of emptiness. This disillusionment is reflected in her internal turmoil: "Like all happiness, this too was a lie" (p. 205). Gürbilek (2001, p. 56) defines this tension as "the melancholia of the modern Turkish woman ... caught between desire and decorum, between the West's promises and the East's prohibitions." Reading Bihter through Gürbilek's framework highlights how her emotional exhaustion is not merely personal but symptomatic of the broader moral crisis produced by late Ottoman modernization. The illusion of marital happiness lasts only a year. During a picnic organized for their anniversary, she secretly observes Behlül making advances toward her married sister, Peyker. Watching their flirtation and passionate kiss unsettles her and forces her to confront the stark reality of her own passionless marriage.

According to Catharine MacKinnon "sexuality is to feminism what work is to Marxism: that which is most one's own, yet most taken away" (1989, p. 3). Bihter's story illustrates how marriage functions as an institution that perpetuates male dominance. Despite initially believing that financial stability would grant her security, Bihter ultimately realizes that her existence remains defined by male authority: first under her father, then her husband. Coupled with her inability to carve out an independent identity, this realization leads to her tragic downfall, echoing Irigaray's criticism of how patriarchal discourse reduces women to objects of exchange: "Women are marked phallically by their fathers, then by their husbands, who provide for their subsistence" (1974, p. 87). Her final act of defiance, taking her own life, is foreshadowed in her earlier lament: "Living is like being imprisoned in a cage" (p. 341). This ultimate rejection of societal constraints, though tragic, underscores the impossibility of true autonomy for women trapped within a rigid patriarchal system.

At that moment, she realizes that a union devoid of love, compatibility, and desire does not fulfill her. Butler argues that "gender norms operate by requiring the embodiment of certain ideals of femininity and masculinity, but these performances can always fail" (2004, p. 42). Bihter's failure to find fulfillment within her marriage exposes the performative nature of her role as a wife: one that she can no longer sustain. However, unlike Edna, who actively seeks independence, Bihter remains trapped in the confines of her social reality. Bihter's trajectory presents the limitations imposed on women in a patriarchal society where marriage is framed as both a form of economic security and an inescapable duty. While she initially believes that wealth and status will offer her agency, her realization that material success cannot replace emotional fulfillment serves as a tragic commentary on the constraints of her world. As she confesses to her mother, "My greatest sin was marrying without love, mother" (45).

Upon returning from their trip, Bihter isolates herself to reflect on her marriage: "No matter what, this house did not belong to her. The title of stepmother also now wearied her" (p. 206). This moment of solitude echoes de Beauvoir's argument that "marriage enslaves women to an alienated existence, reducing them to the Other in the home" (1953, p. 457). Despite the material wealth and social prestige her marriage provides, Bihter remains emotionally unfulfilled and recognizes that she is merely playing the role of an obedient wife rather than living as an autonomous individual. Standing before a mirror, she studies her own body. She becomes increasingly aware of the passionate love she has been deprived of: "She wanted such a love that it would leave intoxicating faintness in her soul" (p. 215). Bihter's self-recognition signals her growing awareness of the constructed nature of her role as a wife. Until now, she has performed the duties of marriage as dictated

by societal norms, yet her dissatisfaction reveals the instability of these performances. The narrator further emphasizes her exhaustion from suppressing these emotions: “The struggles needed to ignore this fact for over a year have exhausted, or rather, crushed her” (p. 205). No longer able to suppress her desire for love and passion, she begins to question the very structures that have surrounded her.

Kristeva’s notion of abjection can explain Bihter’s emotional deterioration. Kristeva argues that “abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it” (1982, p. 9). Bihter’s realization that she has been playing an empty role in a loveless marriage triggers a profound sense of abjection, wherein she no longer identifies with her expected role as a wife. Her longing for passion and intimacy becomes a confrontation with what Kristeva calls “the unbearable Other, an identity that patriarchal society deems forbidden” (Kristeva & Roudiez, 1982, p. 4). As she becomes increasingly aware of her desires, she simultaneously experiences deep guilt and repulsion toward herself, leading to her ultimate self-destruction. This moment of self-recognition is a turning point in her awakening. She experiences deep guilt and acknowledges that her marriage to Adnan Bey was a mistake. Before marriage, she was unaware of these latent desires. Yet now she finds herself comparing her own experiences to those of her mother and sister, further unsettling her state of mind. Fatma Aliye Topuz (1891/1996, p. 73) similarly contends that “the true virtue of women lies not in obedience but in moral consciousness; however, society fears women who think morally for themselves.” This resonates strongly with Bihter’s realization that independent ethical awareness is precisely what condemns her within a moral order structured by male authority.

Yıldıran (2017) suggests that in her attempt to fulfill her youthful dreams, Bihter married Adnan Bey, but upon realizing her disappointment, she becomes drawn toward a forbidden love with Behlül. Ultimately, when she is betrayed, she takes her own life. Although she strives to conform to patriarchal expectations, she ultimately recognizes that she cannot fulfill them. Her lack of parental affection manifests in her longing both to love and to be loved. This emotional void makes her dream life within the grand mansion increasingly unbearable and transforms the opulent home into a space of suffocation: “She could not breathe, felt suffocated; she wanted to get out of this grave and live and love” (p. 112). Kristeva & Roudiez (1982) defines the abject as “what disturbs identity, system, order” (p. 4), particularly when the subject confronts what society forbids yet cannot entirely exclude. Bihter’s adulterous desire and her growing disgust with herself reflect precisely this dual movement of attraction and repulsion. She desires Behlül as a means of self-liberation, but the transgression simultaneously destabilizes her identity, forcing her to confront the moral boundaries that define her existence. Her eventual suicide can be seen as the culmination of abjection: an attempt to purge herself of the impurity she has internalized. In Kristevan terms, Bihter becomes both subject and object of abjection, embodying the social anxiety that accompanies female desire unrestrained by patriarchal law. Such a reading situates her tragedy within the psycho-symbolic order of Ottoman modernity, where the female body is simultaneously sanctified as virtue and condemned as pollution.

Unlike Edna, who actively pursues autonomy through self-exploration and rebellion, Bihter’s defiance is ultimately crushed by betrayal and societal limitations, leaving her with no perceived alternative but self-destruction. Butler argues that “gender norms operate by requiring the embodiment of certain ideals of femininity and masculinity, but these performances can always fail” (2004, p. 42). Bihter’s tragic fate underscores the consequences of failing to conform to societal expectations. While she seeks love and passion outside the rigid boundaries of her marriage, she ultimately faces the full force of patriarchal judgment.

Irigaray & Porter (1985) argues that women, under patriarchy, exist as objects of reflection for male subjectivity, never as autonomous beings. Behlül's treatment of Bihter reinforces this dynamic; he desires her only as an object of conquest, never as a person with her own agency. In her pursuit of passion Bihter attempts to break free from this dynamic, but society punishes her for her transgression. On the other hand, Behlül navigates life through pleasure and indulgence, viewing love as little more than a source of entertainment. His hedonistic tendencies reflect a pronounced narcissism, particularly in his perception of women. He objectifies romantic relationships and sees them as temporary amusements rather than profound connections: "These bundles will multiply and multiply so much that they will finally appear in the cells of my room" (Uşaklıgil, 1900, p. 161). This attitude aligns with de Beauvoir's critique of how men often reduce women to objects of desire and admiration while reserving for themselves the right to move freely between partners. As Klein notes, "greed is a desire that can never be fully satisfied, leading individuals to crave more than they need or more than the object of their desire can offer" (1999, p. 23). Behlül embodies this insatiable desire by taking pleasure in conquest yet refusing to offer any true emotional commitment.

Following their consummation, Bihter is consumed by guilt and an overwhelming sense of shame. She describes herself as "I am now a tainted woman; this love was a disaster for me" (p. 251). In contrast, Behlül remains emotionally detached and shows no remorse or regret. To him, their affair was merely a conquest, a casual escapade that helped him "a chance to settle the score with Peyker" (p. 245). However, for Bihter, the relationship carries far greater weight and exacerbates her internal conflict and deepens her emotional turmoil. She laments, "For me, love was an escape from loneliness, but for Behlül, it was just a game" (p. 248). This disparity in their reactions highlights de Beauvoir's assertion that "it is men who hold the power of definition, while women remain the defined" (p. 267). While Behlül emerges from the affair unscathed, Bihter is left grappling with the weight of societal condemnation, which reinforces the double standard that punishes women for seeking passion outside of marriage. Ahmed (2004a) argues that emotions such as shame and guilt are socially conditioned responses that reinforce patriarchal structures by disciplining female desire.

As time passes, Behlül grows weary of Bihter and longs for his carefree existence before their affair. His perception of her shifts from desire to disdain, and he rationalizes his disengagement by blaming their relationship itself: "Living within this mistake is suffocating me" (p. 252). While Behlül's interest wanes, Bihter's jealousy gradually intensifies, fueled by her fear of abandonment. She confesses, "The coldness in his gaze destroys me; he sees me as if I never existed" (1900, p. 253). Her anxieties are ultimately confirmed when news of Behlül's engagement to Nihal spreads. This revelation, coupled with Firdevs Hanım's opportunistic move to exact revenge on her daughter, sets the stage for Bihter's tragic downfall. In terms, Bihter's identity as a passionate woman collapses under the weight of societal constraints, exposing the precarious nature of gender performances that deviate from social norms. Kristeva & Roudiez (1982) notion of abjection further explains Bihter's descent into despair; as she defies normative femininity, she becomes an outcast, a figure of transgression who is ultimately punished by social forces that reassert control over deviant female desire.

Bihter's obsession with Behlül and her subsequent despair can also be understood through Lacan's notion of desire and the gaze. Lacan (1956) argues that desire is structured around *lack*—the impossible pursuit of a completeness lost with entry into the Symbolic order. Behlül becomes the object of Bihter's *objet petit a*, the unattainable signifier of fulfillment that promises wholeness but perpetuates absence. Her dependence on his attention reflects the power of the male gaze, which, as Mulvey (1975) later elaborates, fixes

the woman as spectacle within the patriarchal visual economy. When Behlül's gaze turns elsewhere—to Nihal—Bihter experiences symbolic death; her identity, constituted through being seen and desired, collapses. Uşaklıgil thus transforms the psychoanalytic dynamics of desire into a social critique, illustrating how female subjectivity under patriarchy is always mediated by the unstable gaze of men and the fragile symbols of moral legitimacy.

Nihal's deep-seated attachment to her father serves as a central theme in her psychological development. From a psychoanalytic perspective, this fixation aligns with Freud's Oedipal complex, which describes how young girls develop latent and dormant sexual desires for their fathers while experiencing subconscious rivalry with their mothers. Freud asserts, "A girl's first object-choice is incestuous, it is directed to her father" (1924, p. 39). Typically, the resolution of the Oedipal complex involves a redirection of affection towards the mother due to the fear of losing maternal love. However, Nihal's case deviates from this trajectory due to the early loss of her mother which disrupts the normal psychological process of detachment and reattachment. Hence, Adnan Bey remains the focal point of her emotional world, and his remarriage to Bihter triggers a psychological crisis that reveals deeper conflicts within Nihal's psyche. She cries out, "You want to take my father away from me, but I will not allow it!" (p. 198). From a Lacanian perspective, Nihal's psychological structure can be understood in terms of desire and the Symbolic Order. According to Lacan (1956), the Name-of-the-Father (Nom-du-Père) functions as the paternal authority that mediates the child's entry into the Symbolic Order that separates her from her primary caregiver and regulates her desire. He explains, "It is in the Name-of-the-Father that we must recognize the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of the law" (p. 67). However, Nihal's development remains arrested in the Imaginary Order due to the absence of her mother, which prevents her from making the necessary transition into a more individuated identity. Instead, she remains psychologically enmeshed with her father, treating him as both a love object and an emotional anchor. This failure to fully transition into the Symbolic Order results in an identity crisis, as Nihal struggles to define herself outside of her attachment to Adnan Bey. This is evident in her obsessive plea: "Daddy, always be mine, always stay by my side!" (p. 101).

Bihter's downfall is not simply a personal tragedy but a reflection of the broader societal forces that limit women's agency. While she initially embraces the role of the dutiful wife, she later seeks to redefine her identity outside of marriage and eventually challenges the rigid expectations placed upon her. However, her inability to fully escape these constraints leads to her ultimate destruction. She recognizes her fate: "No one wants me in this house anymore, there is no escape left for me" (p. 255). Butler argues that "gender norms operate by requiring the embodiment of certain ideals of femininity" (2004, p. 42). Similarly, Moi (1985) criticizes the essentialist notions of femininity and emphasizes how patriarchal structure dictates women's roles and makes it nearly impossible for them to achieve true autonomy. Bihter's attempt to reconcile her desires with societal norms ultimately fails. This illustrates the unforgiving nature of a world that punishes women for seeking fulfillment beyond their prescribed roles. Her tragic realization is captured in her final lament: "There was no place for me in this life; I was too much for this world" (p. 256).

Neither American nor Ottoman society in the 19th century was fully prepared to embrace these evolving gender roles and left women unable to break free from traditional gender norms. Though set in vastly different contexts, both novels explore similar challenges faced by women and the broader tensions between personal desire and social expectations. Both Edna and Bihter fail to reconcile their longing for autonomy with the rigid constraints of their societies. Their tragic ends serve as a criticism of the limitations imposed on women which demonstrates the inescapable reality of gendered oppression. Uşaklıgil provides a

scathing criticism of the rigid social hierarchy and moral expectations that define late 19th-century Istanbul. Bihter is an embodiment of the struggles of women who want personal agency and autonomy. However, her personal struggle is met with the moral constraints of her class. According to Acar (2021) Bihter is the epitome of the "new woman" figure. This new woman tries to break free from the patriarchal oppression. Unlike Edna, Bihter' s fate is sealed by patriarchal oppression of Ottoman society. The psychoanalytic reading of the text underscores the psychological consequences of such rigidity. Yıldız (2020) argues that Bihter and Nihal are deeply affected by the pressures of societal norms. Such standards lead to their emotional and psychological turmoil. Bihter's tragic demise shows the consequences of subverting deeply ingrained moral expectations that reinforce the notion that women's desires and transgressions are not to be tolerated within the strict confines of Ottoman society.

Conclusion

The study examined two novels' s protagonists who defy societal expectations. Edna and Bihter show the severe consequences of such transgressions. Despite their unique and peculiar cultural settings, both heroines fight against the patriarchal norms that confine women to restrictive roles in marriage. Edna' s awakening illustrates one of an existential journey in which she discovers herself and gains economic independence. However, she ultimately realizes that the society provides no room for a woman who refuses to conform. Her final act of defiance, suicide, is not an act of guilt but instead a refusal of a role that denies her any agency whatsoever. In contrast, Biter's tragic fall stems from an emotional desire and defiance of the rigid honor codes of society. Unlike Edna, she falls for a man who never loved her. Her demise underscores the severe consequences of female transgression in a rigid moral environment. Both novels expose the universal oppression of women, which reinforces literary works' role in criticizing the social constraints on female autonomy. Therefore, the study showed how patriarchal societies punish women who seek satisfaction outside of traditional roles. Such roles offer few choices beyond submission, exile, or death. Also both works emphasize the importance of mutual love and emotional compatibility in marriage. If those elements are removed in marriage, it ends up in disillusionment and societal condemnation. While the analysis offers insights into gender and societal control, it is limited in its scope. An investigation of male perspectives in the narrative, for instance those of Leonce Pontellier and Behlül, could possibly reveal how patriarchal systems shape not only women but men's roles as well. Also expanding the study to include novels like *Madame Bovary, Anna Karenina*, or the *The Tale of Genji*, could help to provide a comprehensive interpretation of how literature across different cultures portrays the female defiance. Ultimately, this study puts both novels as enduring commentaries at the intersection of power, gender, and societal control. Both works' tragic conclusions serve as a criticism of social structures which fail to accommodate women's search for a meaningful life beyond domesticity. This reinforces the literature's role in illuminating the persistent search for female independence.

Funding statement

This research received no external funding.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Data availability

No datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

Author contribution

The author confirms sole responsibility for the conception, design, analysis, interpretation, writing, and revision of the manuscript.

References

Acar, F. (2021). *Gender and Modernization in Late Ottoman Literature*. Istanbul: Istanbul University Press.
Ahmed, S. (2004a). *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. London: Routledge.
Ahmed, S. (2017b). *Living a Feminist Life*. Durham: Duke University Press.
Akyüz, E. (2021). *Women and Marriage in Late Ottoman Society: A Historical Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Arslan, Y. (2023). *Mother-Daughter Conflicts in Ottoman and Turkish Literature*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
Beauvoir, S. de (1953). *The Second Sex*. Translated by H. M. Parshley. New York: V Vintage.
Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge.
Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing Gender*. London: Routledge.
Carter, A. & Ellison, R. (2023). *Reevaluating Feminist Themes in Nineteenth- Century Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Chopin, K. (1899). *The Awakening.* Chicago: Herbert S. Stone & Co.
Erdem, H. (2023). *Women and Social Transgressions in Ottoman Fiction*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
Fraser, N. (1997). *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition*. London: Routledge.
Freud, S. (1924). The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex, in *Collected Papers*, Vol. II. London: Hogarth Press, pp. 39–52.
Friedan, B. (1963). *The feminine mystique.* W. W. Norton.
Gilbert, S. & Gubar, S. (1979). *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
Göknar, M. (2022). *Economic Constraints and Gender in Turkish Literature*. London: Routledge.
Gürbilek, N. (2001). *Kötü Çocuk Türk: Dar Kapıdan Geçerken.* İstanbul: Metis Yayınları.
Harrington, J. (2022). *The Gendered Politics of Freedom: A Feminist Literary Analysis*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Heilman, R. (2008). *Marriage, Sex, and Class in Nineteenth-Century Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
hooks, B. (1984). *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Boston: South End Press.
hooks, B. (1990). *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. Boston: South End Press.
Irigaray, L. (1974). *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Translated by G. C. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
Irigaray, L. (1985). *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Translated by C. Porter. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
Jarrell, M. (2022). *Fluid Identities: The Symbolism of Water in The Awakening*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
Jones, P. (2020). *Lacan and Feminism: A Theoretical Intersection*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
Kaya, N. & Demir, H. (2022). *Economic Dependency and Women's Agency in Turkey*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Klein, M. (1999). *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946–1963*. New York: Free Press.
Kristeva, J. (1982). *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Translated by L. S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press.
Lacan, J. (1956). The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis. in *Ecrits*. Translated by A. Sheridan. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 67–92.

Lin, C. (2023). *Symbolism and Resistance in Nineteenth-Century Female Protagonists*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
MacKinnon, C. (1989). *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
Manne, K. (2018). *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Mitchell, R. (2024). *Women, Guilt, and Patriarchal Judgment in Classic Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Moi, T. (1985). *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London: Methuen.
Moran, B. (1990). *Türk Romanına Eleştirel Bir Bakış I: Ahmet Mithat'tan A. H. Tanpınar'a*. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.
Mulvey, L. (1975*).* Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. *Screen*, 16(3), 6–18.
Patel, S. (2023). *Intersectionality and the Question of Privilege in Feminist Discourse*. London: Routledge.
Parla, J. (2011). *Babalar ve Oğullar: Tanzimat Romanının Epistemolojik Temelleri.* İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.
Rich, A. (1980). Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 5(4), 631–660.
Roberts, H. (2023). *Freedom and Constraint: The Limits of Female Autonomy in Literature*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Smith, D.E. (1987). *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
Taylor, M. (2021). *Revolutionary Feminism and the Nineteenth-Century Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Tekeli, Ş. (1986). *Kadınlar ve Siyasal-Toplumsal Hayat.* İstanbul: Birikim Yayınları.
Topuz, F. A. (1891/1996). *Nisvan-ıİslam*. İstanbul: Tercüman 1001 Temel Eser.
Uşaklıgil, H. Z. (1900). *Aşk-ıMemnu*. Dersaadet: Alem Matbaası.
Yıldıran, G. (2017). *Ottoman Women and the Literary Depiction of Social Expectations*. Istanbul: Istanbul University Press.
Yıldız, M. (2020). *Psychoanalysis and Turkish Literature: The Case of Aşk-ıMemnû*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.